

pursuits

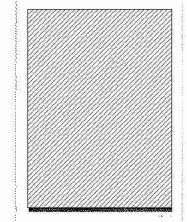
FIRST CLASS » DREAM OF AFRICA

Tailor-made safaris create truly awesome vacations.

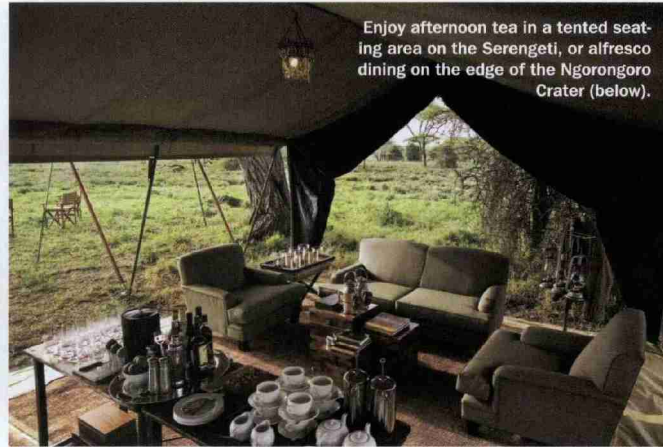
BY ROBERT RAGAINI

Raised in Africa, William Jones created Journeys by Design to provide as perfect a vacation as an African safari can be. The first thing I wanted, I told him, was to witness the vast migration on the Serengeti Plains in Tanzania, where each year, more than two million animals follow the rains that nourish the grasses they feed upon.

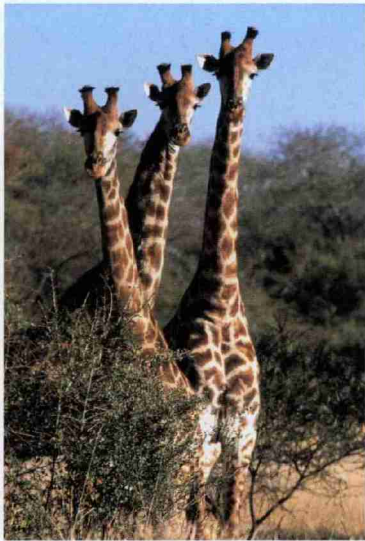
Five minutes after landing on a dirt airstrip, a parade of ungainly wildebeests surges toward us. With horns too small for such large heads, these beasts seem slapped together from spare parts. Soon we're surrounded by the herd—two to three thousand head, our driver estimates.



pursuits » first class



Enjoy afternoon tea in a tented seating area on the Serengeti, or alfresco dining on the edge of the Ngorongoro Crater (below).



Roughing it was never this luxurious (top). Visitors can expect to see a variety of animals, including giraffes and zebras.



been turned down by my personal butler. Roughing it involves listening to the rhythmic sounds of buckets being filled with hot water to shower down on guests in private enclosures under the African sky.

On the last evening in the Serengeti, we sit around a crackling fire, listening to tales of stealthy predators, pugnacious buffalos and barrel-shaped hippopotamuses. My lasting image is of the endless plains, blanketed by wildebeests and zebras.

My second wish is to visit the Ngorongoro Crater. Jones places me in a huge suite in the Ngorongoro Crater Lodge. The pink stucco walls curl around sitting areas with wood-burning fireplaces, past free-standing tubs under domes hung with crystal chandeliers, to a mammoth four-post bed. Large, free-form patios sprawl outdoors.

The 100-square-mile volcanic bowl spreads out below, viewed from the lodge's priceless perch on the rim of the crater. But where are the animals? We see grasslands, sheer walls, Lake Magadi plopped down off-center, but not a sign of life.

Only when we descend do we realize how high the lodge sits. On the way down, the driver halts by three stately Masai war-

REALIZE YOUR OWN DREAM OF AFRICA

This month's Naples Winter Wine Festival auction includes a unique, private, all-inclusive Kenyan safari donated by Journeys by Design. One couple will have their own unforgettable six-night African adventure, visiting three private game reserves where each camp is solar-powered and constructed of thatch and local materials. Created by Tamimi, an eco-tourism adventure company, the excursion will be ultra-luxurious while showcasing the magnificent natural surroundings.

rriors arrayed in brilliant robes who agree to be photographed for a fee. Shortly after, we stop again near a large hawk sitting in an acacia tree.

Finally, on an immense circular plain, we behold one of the largest concentrations of wildlife in Africa. Vehicles are restricted to park roads. No matter. The nonchalant animals cause traffic jams, as enthralled visitors gape at them from an arm's length away.

Millions of years have passed since the Ngorongoro Crater was formed. In few places do peaks, plains, valleys and lakes coexist in such proximity. The magnificent landscape we see is much the same as the one that Stone Age, Iron Age and pastoral ancestors saw. At this moment, we are the most recent—and most privileged—inhabitants. (journeysbydesign.com) ♦

We witness beautiful gazelles mingling with the wildebeests. Frisky zebra colts gambol about. Driving six miles to camp takes two hours, as we stop to admire giraffes craning their necks for succulent leaves, as well as elephants, lions, eagles and prairies black with wildebeests. Each day, soulful-eyed dik-diks, the tiniest antelopes, stare at us as we embark on game drives.

After dark our butlers, armed with flashlights, escort us to our tents. How they would protect us from a lion attack only they know; thankfully we don't need to find out. Jones has matched me with my canvas accommodations for this African adventure. Although a tent that folds up to be pitched later somewhere else sounds less than luxurious, this is a special tent.

Each night I sleep on fine linens that have